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## Marriage Among The Oraon Tribe Of Chotanagpur (Jharkhand)

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### Summary:

The Oraon is the largest populated tribal group (as per 1991 census) of the Chotanagpur plateau in Jharkhand (earlier in Bihar) state of India. These tribal people are mainly concentrated in rural areas of Ranchi, Gumla, Simdega, Lohardaga, Hazaribagh and Palamu districts of the state and they have been living with other tribal and another community people since long past. However with the passage of time, they have migrated to different parts of the country during pre and post Independent era in search of their livelihood (as manual labour). They have their own language called Kurukh which belongs to the Dravidian linguistic family (Grierson 1927). The people like to follow their traditional life and culture which is reflected in their material culture namely house type, household utensils, furniture, dress, ornaments, tattoo marks, agricultural, hunting and fishing implements, musical instruments, food and drinks etc.; economic organization i.e. division of labour on the basis of age and gender, method of paddy cultivation, strong social organization, socialization process, political and religious organization, customary laws, practices, rituals etc. They have passed through gathering stage and later on developed the settled agricultural economy. The society is patriarchal, patrilineal with equality in male and female participation. It is an open society to consider men women to be equal, there is no disparity with girls and boys. Along with that more flexibility is found in their blood and life for the progress and scientific temperament. They follow the age-old culture, tradition, customs and value system in their life. The people have totemic clans or gotra, which are named after birds, animals, fishes, plants, vegetables, objects and minerals; such as Addo (ox), Aind (a fish), Alla (dog), Bakula (Heron), Bando (wild cat), Bara (Banyan), Barwa (wild dog), Beck (Salt), Chidra (Squirrel), Edgo (Mouse), Ekka or kachhap (Turtle), Gari (monkey), Gede (Duck), Gidhi (vulture), Halman (langur), Keond (a fruit), Khoya (wild dog), Kinduar (a fish), Kosuar (a fish), Kiro (a fruit), Kiss (pig), Kerketta (Hedge- sparrow), Kokro (cock), Kujur ( A medicinal plant), Lakra (Tiger), Minz (a fish), Khetta or Nag (Cobra), Panna (Iron), Tido (a fish), Tirkuar (tithio bird), Tirkey (an eagle), Toppo (Woodpecker), Tigga (Monkey), Xalxo (pigeon), Xaxa (Crow), Xess or Dhan (Paddy).

**Key Words:** Invitation, Reception, Marriage, Feast, Labour, Rituals, Last Ceremony.

The Kurukh or Oraon also spelt Uraon, or Dhangar (Kurukh: Karkh and Oraon) are a Dravidian speaking ethnolinguistic group inhabiting Chhotanagpur Plateau and adjoining areas -mainly the Indian states of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal. They predominantly speak Kurukh as their native language, which belongs to the Dravidian language family. In Maharashtra, Oraon people are also known as Dhangad or Dhangar which means youthfulness, young and energetic persons.

Oraons depended on the forest and farms for their ritual practices and livelihoods, but in recent times, they have become mainly settled agriculturalists. Many Oraon migrated to tea gardens of Assam, West Bengal and Bangladesh, Andaman Nicobar Islands as well as to countries like Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Mauritius during British rule, where they were known as Hill Coolies. They are listed as a Scheduled Tribe for the purpose of India's reservation system in Indian Constitution.

Kurukh are traditional speakers of Kurukh, which belongs to the northern branch of the Dravidian family. Just under half still speak this language as their mother tongue. Many have adopted the local lingua francas, Sadri as their first language. This shift to regional languages, especially Sadri, has been most pronounced in West Bengal, Bangladesh, Assam and Tripura, where the Kurukh are mainly tea garden workers and Sadri is the main link language.

**Their marriage** is strictly clan exogamy and tribe endogamy. They strongly follow birth, marriage and death rituals, ceremonies and feast at their residence in the presence of community members and relatives. The village level political organization is called **parha** which consists of a number of posts viz. **Pahan** (village religious priest), **Panibharwa** (assistant of *Pahan* for carrying water and other religious essentials), **Pujar** (assistant of *Pahan*), **Bhandari** and **Chowkidar**. Each one has a particular role to play in the religious ceremonies, festivals and feasts and for solving any kind of dispute at the village level. The traditional informal, educational institution youth dormitory **Dhumkuria** is no longer in its original form and function but has been replaced by a community house (Sahay and Duary 1998:24-25). The public and common meeting place **Akhra** is located in front of the **Dhumkuria** where they meet for the purpose of discussion and solving any kind of disputes. Moreover, the people of both the genders, at this place, sing and dance together accompanied with musical instruments like *nagara*, *dholki*, *khel*, *tiryo*, *murli*, *bhanree*, *theehka*, *jhanj* and *jharj* in all festivals and religious occasions.

The religion followed by them is called **Sarna** which means nature worship. The religious place *Jhakra* is centrally located within the village where traditional deity *Chalapachu* resides. The fowl sacrifice and other offerings are made at this place in her name on the occasion of festivals. They have strong belief in their traditional deities namely *Chalapachu* or *Jhakrabudi*, *Dharmesh*, *Gaondevi*, *Mahadania* etc. and also keep faith on ghost, spirit and evil eye equally. The major religious festivals of the Oraon are **Sarhul**, **Karma**, Murmajatra and hunting or Sikar, Phagu.

The Sikar festivals are Bisu Sikar, Phagu sikar. Mukra Sikar. They also celebrate a number of agricultural festivals like Dhanbuni, Ropni, Harihari, Nayakhani, Khariyani etc. They have their oral tradition related to their origin, migration, culture and society and have their own indigenous knowledge to preserve the environment and cure the disease and sickness by use of their traditional pharmacopia. This tribe is now well organized for revival of their culture, the fading institutions and tradition.

The Oraon have distinct characteristic features unlike other tribal communities of the area. Their manner of invitation, salutation, organizing feasts as well as gift offering on the marriage occasion, differentiate them from other neighboring tribals namely Munda, Ho, Santhali, Mahali, Chick Baraik, Lohra and Kharia. They receive their guests in a manner by offering water in vessel called lota for washing legs and hands before entering the house or when they sit down in the house which reflects their warm feeling towards others. The refinement of Oraon culture can be exemplified from the intricacies of their marriage customs. As marriage involves social tie between two families, the etiquette of inviting many other families with pinch of yellow turmeric dried rice personally into kin bondage, highlights their cultural standard.

### **Invitation:**

The Oraon people on every social occasion invite the community members and relatives to share their joy, emotions, blessings, co-operation and participation. On the marriage ceremony they take part in this auspicious occasion and interact with other relatives and invitees. The traditional way of invitation for marriage ceremony (both boy and girl) is made with smearing of turmeric and sun dried rice i.e. **newta tikhil**. A few days before the marriage ceremony the women carry the newta tikhil in her anchol (end part of the veil of the saree) and offer the same to the invitees at their residences who receive it in their anchol.

But in case of male, the same rice is carried in a paper packet (previously in leaf cup), which he offers as invitation for his son's or daughter's marriage. After receiving the *newta tikhil* they make an exchange of news and any other related queries. Afterwards, the *newta tikhil* is thrown on the roof of the home. The invitation is mainly offered by the head of the concerned family to his/her relatives and community members. In case of odd situation i.e. in the absence of parents or any guardian, the groom himself perform the same responsibility in similar manner but the bride never invites. However they have the liberty to invite friends and peer group as sanctioned by the Oraon society. The boy invites friends with *newta tikhil* where as the girl invites verbally. Some times a few literate persons use printed cards for inviting the distantly located relatives, clan members, relatives and friends.

### **Reception:**

On the occasion of the marriage, the relatives bring with them rice beer *handia* in an earthen pot *ardi*, rice, vegetables in bamboo basket called *doura* on his/her head. The *handia* is considered to be one of the most essential items in every socio-religious occasion as offerings to the deities as well as entertaining guests as symbol of honor. The host has to feed all. In order to reduce the burden on host family, the relatives carry the edible gifts, rice, vegetables, potatoes, pulses etc. This is a unique example of sharing responsibility. The guests come to

the groom's house on the *chumawan* ritual (on the day of blessing) whereas the relatives of bride start arriving on the day of marriage or a day before.

The Oraon people welcome the relatives and guest with honor in their traditional manner. Both the persons stand face to face at *chali* (courtyard) and bow their heads with the extension of right hand with open fist and left hand touching the elbow of the right hand while uttering **gord lagna**.

After that the unmarried girls of the host's family request the invitees to sit on a **pirha** (small wooden stool) at *chali* and wash their feet on a *daram chhipa* (brass plate) pouring water from a brass container (*lota*) and then anoint their feet and hands with *moni essung* (mastered oil). The invitees keep some small coins on the *daram chhipa* as token of receiving honor. The lady collects the coins, throwing the water on the roof of the house. Another woman collects the down running water on her *anchol* as blessing. This custom is performed mainly to give honor to the guest as well to provide relaxation to his/her tiredness of their long journey on foot. This process is followed with the invitation by the house owner to enter the house and taking seat on *chatai* (palm leaves mat). They are offered drinking water in a brass *lota*, *khaini* (tobacco leaf), *chuna* (lime stone paste) and *handia* along with *chakhna* (wet gram) in a *dona* (sal leaf bowl).

On the day of marriage the bride party welcome the groom and his party from **Janamasadda** in a traditional ritual **pawchhana**. **Janamasadda** is a place of bride's village where groom party stay before coming to the bride's house for marriage. This is a nice welcoming procession consisting of community members, relatives and guests. They perform the *benja nalna* (marriage dance) and songs by both the genders accompanied with musical instruments and played by *Mahalis*. One male person carries a lighted torch made of a sickle wrapped round at its blade with old cotton cloth and placed in *daram chhipa* containing *moni essung* and keeps a few coins in it. An old married lady carries a brass *lota* (coated with *abdatikhil* paste on it) on her head over a *khejur bindo* (date palm leaves pad). The *lota* (vessel) is filled with water, where a mango twig with 5-7 leaves is put dipping the stalk in the pot. Another married lady carries an earthen pot (*kalash*) decorated with sheaves of paddy and *gendapunp* (marigold flower). After reaching the procession at *Janamasadda* the lady first sprinkles the water from the *lota* (vessel) with the mango twig on the head of the groom. Then show the auspicious light to him and lastly one young man carries the groom on his shoulder from this place to *madwa* (a temporary shed made with green *sakhua* i.e. *shorea rohusa* branches where marriage takes place).

Simultaneously the women of the bride party anoint the *balka* (turmeric) paste on the check of the groom party members as warm welcome and honor to them in this auspicious occasion. The bride party offers the water, *handia* and *khaini* to the groom party after reaching the bride's house.

The Oraon people are very careful in selecting gift items. They make selection of such items, which are useful in the day-to-day life of the newly married couple. Their gift items comprise of steel box, metal container, metal utensils, ukhlu (spice grinder), clothes and money which they bring along with them for attending the marriage ceremony. These are offered to the bridegroom at the time of chumawan and other rituals of the marriage function at both the boy's and girl' places. At the time of chumawan the name of the item offered is announced by beating a big drum (nagara).

### **Feasts:**

A mutual cooperation is always seen in each and every stage of marriage ceremony since selection of bride and groom. This kind of cooperation is better reflected in the marriage feast where irrespective of their gender, experience, and expatriation everyone willingly comes forward to lend their hands. Women help in the preparation of sal leaf sorda (plate), dona and jhara keta (bowl) whereas the men help in cooking as well as distributing food and water. The food usually comprises of ardka tikhil (boiled rice), aamkhil (vegetable curry), dali (pulse), khasi ahra (mutton) etc. Food items are served to the people sitting in a row at the chali.

### **Conclusion:**

The Oraon people still follow the traditional customs and manners as their social values due to integrated social organization and customary practices. This is explicit in marriage invitation process, reception of guest, relatives, sharing experience, contribution and their cooperation for better conduct of the marriage ceremony. Moreover, we observe the role and status of women. The young generation also follows their age-old tradition with instruction from elder and experienced members of the society. Like other human societies, Oraons are also not immune to change. The neighboring Hindu and Christian people have influenced many changes. Except for utilizing modern facilities, these Oraon people, have tried to maintain their cultural tradition.

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